UNITED
NATIONS

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Security Council

Distr.
GENERAL

S/24633
8 October 1992
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: FRENCH

LETTER DATED 7 OCTOBER 1992 FROM THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to refer to the statement by the President of the Security Council, dated 10 September 1992 (S/24542), on the conflict in Abkhazia. The statement took note, inter alia, of my intention to send a mission of good offices to Georgia. It also requested me to inform the Council periodically of the development of the conflict in Abkhazia.

The mission of good offices, headed by Mr. Gustave Feissel, Director in the Department of Political Affairs, took place from 12 to 20 September 1992. In Tbilisi, the mission met with Mr. Eduard Shevardnadze, President of the State Council of the Republic of Georgia, Mr. Alexander Chikvaidze, Minister for Foreign Affairs, and Mr. Sandro Kavsadze, Deputy Prime Minister, and with representatives of the State Council and several political parties. The mission also went to Sukhumi, the capital of Abkhazia, where it was able to talk to representatives of the Supreme Council of Abkhazia, including its first Deputy President. In addition, the mission went to the town of Gudauta which is currently the headquarters of the Abkhazian group in the Supreme Council. In Gudauta the mission had lengthy discussions with the President of the Supreme Council, Mr. Vladislav Ardzinba. While in Sukhumi and Gudauta the mission also met with representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Upon returning to Tbilisi the mission had a further meeting with Mr. Shevardnadze and also with representatives of the diplomatic community.

On returning to New York, the mission presented me with a detailed report giving its observations and conclusions. I have the honour to annex hereto a summary of the report, for the information of members of the Council.

As you know, the situation in Abkhazia has deteriorated considerably in recent days. Fierce fighting has broken out again, threatening peace and security in the region. The Council is aware that yesterday I received a letter from the Deputy President of the State Council of Georgia, underscoring the gravity of the situation and requesting United Nations support (S/24626).

In view of the serious deterioration in the conflict in Abkhazia I intend, as a matter of urgency, to send a further United Nations mission to the region, headed by an Under-Secretary-General.

The mission will inform the parties of the international community's grave concern over the fighting which is breaking out in Abkhazia and which threatens the maintenance of international peace and security in the region. It will stress the urgency of prompt and full implementation of the agreement of 3 September. In that connection, the mission will explore ways in which the United Nations can support implementation of the agreement, including the deployment of civilian and/or military observers. The mission will include several observers who will remain on the spot in order to provide an initial United Nations presence.

(Signed) Boutros BOUTROS-GHALI

Annex

Summary of the report of the goodwill mission to Georgia

(12-20 September 1992)

[Original: English]

The situation in Abkhazia

1. The immediate crisis in Abkhazia can be attributed to the widespread sabotage and looting since early this year in Abkhazia and western Georgia, which the mission was informed has resulted in some 11 billion roubles in lost goods and has virtually cut Georgia's links with the Russian Federation, its main trading partner; and to actions by the ethnic Abkhaz leadership related to their declaring the former Abkhaz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic as an independent Republic.

2. The situation in Abkhazia is significantly affected by the efforts of ex-President Gamsakhurdia to destabilize the Government of Georgia, the presence in Abkhazia of a significant number of north Caucasian fighters and the provision of supplies from that area in support of the Abkhaz side, as well as the easy availability of weapons apparently obtained to a large extent from elements of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) armed forces stationed there. The existence of Georgian paramilitary elements and the lack of discipline in the Georgian armed forces further aggravates the problem.

3. Abkhazia, located in the north-western part of Georgia, has a population of some 540,000 of which only about 18 per cent are Abkhaz. The majority of the population is Georgian (about 47 per cent), and others include Armenians (about 18 per cent) and Russians (about 13 per cent).

4. The relations between Georgians and Abkhaz has been tense on and off for many decades (it should be noted that Abkhaz are ethnically related to the north Caucasian mountain tribes and not to Georgians. Like the north Caucasians, a significant proportion of Abkhaz are of the Islamic faith.). Most recently, strains surfaced in 1978 when an Abkhaz campaign was launched to separate the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia from the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic and to incorporate it in the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic. While this was rejected by both the Russia Federation and Georgia, significant concessions were made to the Abkhaz, including a disproportionate representation in the Supreme Soviet of Abkhazia. These concessions in turn contributed to the growing perception among Georgians, very much evident at present, that the Abkhaz were benefiting from unfair preferential treatment. In 1989, demands were again made that Abkhazia be detached from Georgia and be granted the status of full Union Republic, which it had enjoyed from 1921 to 1930. Negative reaction among Georgians led to the first of a series of violent incidents, which resulted in a significant number of deaths.

5. The events that led to the disintegration of the Soviet Union and to Georgian independence further encouraged the proponents for Abkhazian independence. In August 1990, the Abkhaz Supreme Soviet, in the absence of the Georgian representatives, declared Abkhazia a sovereign republic of the Soviet Union independent of Georgia. This was immediately annulled by the Georgian Supreme Soviet.

6. During Mr. Gamsakhurdia's presidency, an agreement was reached between the Abkhaz leadership and the Georgian Government on a new election law under which the 18 per cent Abkhaz population was allocated 28 seats in the Supreme Council of Abkhazia, the 47 per cent Georgians were allocated 26 seats, and the remaining 35 per cent of the population (mainly Armenians and Russians) were allocated 11 seats. The law stipulated that major decisions had to be taken by two-thirds majority. In December 1991, a new Supreme Council was elected on the basis of this electoral law. However, this new law did not ease the political tensions. On the contrary, during the first half of 1992, the Abkhazian Supreme Council split into two opposing factions (Georgian and Abkhaz, with the 11 Armenian and Russian representatives divided almost evenly between the two) and for all intents and purposes the Supreme Council ceased to function as a whole.

7. When in mid-1992 the Government of Georgia concluded that the police was unable to control the ongoing sabotage and looting, it decided to send some 2,000 Georgian troops to Abkhazia for the announced purpose of protecting the railway and other communication links. Mr. Shevardnadze emphasized that it was the sovereign right of the Republic of Georgia to relocate troops within its territory. He told the mission that he had called Mr. Ardzinba about these arrangements.

8. Fierce fighting broke out when the Georgian troops entered Abkhazia on 14 August 1992 which resulted in some 200 dead and hundreds wounded. Mr. Shevardnadze pointed out that, in order to limit the conflict, he had restrained the Georgian armed forces from moving throughout Abkhazia, a decision for which he had been criticized by various political leaders in Georgia. When the fighting broke out, the Abkhaz leadership left Sukhumi for Gudauta, from where it is currently operating. The violence has resulted in up to 40,000 persons of various ethnic origins in Abkhazia becoming refugees and displaced persons.

9. While acknowledging that the Abkhaz people had legitimate grievances, Mr. Shevardnadze stressed that the attack against the Georgian troops was unprovoked and he believed that it had been planned in advance. He claimed that the north Caucasian fighters had come to Abkhazia before the fighting broke out. He added that earlier in the current year, while the Government of Georgia was preoccupied with the situation in South Ossetia, the Abkhaz leadership had repeatedly provoked the authorities in Tbilisi by such measures as the establishment of a 400 to 500-strong mono-ethnic national guard.

10. Mr. Ardzinba maintained that the stated reason for the Georgian army entering Abkhazia was merely a pretext by the Government of Georgia to

"oppress" the people of Abkhazia. He denied that he had received a phone call from Mr. Shevardnadze prior to the Georgian troops moving into Abkhazia. Mr. Ardzinba argued that the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the independence of Georgia and the adoption of its 1921 constitution created a legal vacuum which Abkhazia had the right to fill by declaring its independence.

The 3 September agreement

11. The 3 September agreement signed in Moscow by President Yeltsin and Chairman Shevardnadze and agreed to by the leaders of Abkhazia, including Mr. Ardzinba, inter alia ensures the territorial integrity of the Republic of Georgia, provides for a cease-fire as of 5 September 1992, establishes a Monitoring and Inspection Commission composed of representatives of Georgia, Abkhazia and the Russian Federation to ensure compliance with the agreement, provides for the disarming and withdrawal of all illegal armed formations that have come from outside of Georgia, provides for the reduction of the armed forces of Georgia in Abkhazia to an agreed number required to protect railway and certain other installations, calls for the exchange of detainees, prisoners and hostages by 10 September 1992, calls for the removal of all impediments to the free movement of goods and persons, the return of refugees to their homes and the search for missing persons, calls for the resumption of the normal functions by the legitimate authorities of Abkhazia by 15 September 1992, and appeals to the United Nations and the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) to support the principles of the agreement.

12. Mr. Shevardnadze underlined the importance of the 3 September agreement and called for its full implementation. He accused the Abkhaz side of continuing to violate the cease-fire, in particular, along the Bzib River in northern Abkhazia. It was noted that the cease-fire was holding along the Gumsite River, where the tripartite Commission has succeeded in interposing Russian troops between the two sides. He stressed the inseparability of the cease-fire and the withdrawal of the north Caucasian irregulars, and confirmed Georgia's willingness to reduce its troops to an agreed number necessary to protect the railway and other installations. He called for the urgent convening of the Abkhaz Parliament in Sukhumi or elsewhere in Abkhazia and for a secret vote by the parliament to decide whether the current authorities should remain in office or not.

13. Mr. Shevardnadze agreed to the need to preserve the autonomy of Abkhazia and to maintain its self-government status. He stressed, however, that a solution had to preserve the territorial integrity of Georgia and had to be acceptable to both Abkhaz and Georgians.

14. Mr. Ardzinba stressed that he had been forced to sign the 3 September agreement which he described as a pro-Georgian document. He stated that Abkhazia was not a part of Georgia and that the reference in the agreement to the territorial integrity of Georgia did not affect Abkhazia. He accused Georgia of continuing to violate the agreement and claimed that Georgian troops were still involved in attacking civilians as well as in widespread looting.

15. Mr. Ardzinba stated that all Georgian troops had to be withdrawn from Abkhazia before other aspects of the agreement could be implemented, including the withdrawal of the north Caucasian elements and the resumption of the functions by the Abkhazian authorities. He called for direct negotiations with Tbilisi to establish some kind of confederation or federation.

Observations

16. The situation in Abkhazia remains very tense and explosive with repercussions that could easily transcend Georgia's borders. The 3 September agreement remains largely unimplemented. Law and order in Akhazia has broken down to a large degree. If the problem is allowed to fester, it could assume ethnic and religious dimensions and draw neighbouring countries into the conflict.

17. The prompt application of the agreement should remain the foundation upon which a peaceful settlement can be negotiated. Support from the international community could help to encourage both sides to abide by the agreement and to negotiate a political settlement for Abkhazia that is fair to all concerned.

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